

Oom Pah Pow!

Affalterbach Takes the Gloves Off

WORDS JONNY LIEBERMAN

Despite the GLE 63 S' bruiser image, the interior is about as refined as they come. After a month or so of learning, most owners should have MBUX mostly figured out.



AMG'S MIDDLEWEIGHT SUV BRAWLER HITS HARD

Mercedes-AMG surprised no one this past November when it took the wraps off the two most powerful SUVs AMG makes: the three-row GLS 63 and the two-row GLE 63 S, the latter being the subject of this review. It makes 603 horsepower and 627 lb-ft of torque, plus has hybrid assist.

Fast-forward four months, and I'm cruising west on the Pacific Coast Highway through Malibu behind the wheel of a blue GLE 63 S. I'm not going too much over the speed limit, 70 mph or so, and there's a

little blue square on the dashboard telling me the big boy is only using four of its eight cylinders. Moreover, another digital readout is letting me know the electric motor is sending power to the transmission. What sort of an AMG is this?

A complex one, it turns out. The GLE 63 S (and the mechanically identical GLS 63) is the first AMG to feature Mercedes' 48-volt mild-hybrid V-8 engine, code-named M176. This 4.0-liter twin-turbo engine replaces the old M157 5.5-liter twin-turbo V-8. The 48-volt V-8 is smaller, lighter, (maybe) more efficient, and most important for AMG, makes more power and torque. Like the M256 inline-six, the M176 is beltless and uses both an electric water pump and AC compressor, and both the starter and the alternator are replaced by the integrated starter-generator, or ISG. In addition to starting the thing up and supplying juice to the various onboard electric and electronic systems, the ISG can also supply 21 horsepower and 184 lb-ft of torque to the driveline.

Does that mean the GLE 63 S' total system output is 624 hp (603 + 21) and 811 lb-ft of torque (627 + 184)? No. That's not how it works. That 184 lb-ft occurs at zero rpm, just as the ISG starts spinning. Peak torque for the V-8 happens at over 5,000 rpm, and by that point the ISG is contributing nothing. AMG claims this SUV will hit 60 mph in 3.7 seconds. I have a hunch this beast will be even quicker. I'd bet it runs the quarter mile in 12.0 seconds. Maybe even 11.9. If you take nothing else away from this review, know this: This machine feels absurdly quick and overly potent, and it will have you laughing every time you kick the throttle.

In addition to 48-volt engine accessories, the GLE 63 S comes with AMG's Active

Ride Control, 48-volt active anti-roll bars that use a set of planetary gears on each bar to counteract body movements. This system keeps the GLE 63 S pretty much flat through corners. This sucker weighs in at 5,467 pounds—in comparison, a 2020 GLE 450, a similar vehicle with the same air springs but with a six-cylinder engine, tipped the scales at 5,178 pounds. Notice I said air springs and not the fast-acting, hydropneumatic suspension available on the GLE 450. The one that bounces. Why not? AMG claims that the hydraulic system is too heavy, a statement that's laughable on the surface until you realize that there's a 260-pound weight penalty between the air-sprung SUVs and the hydropneumatic versions.

But enough tech talk—how does the newest GLE 63 S drive?

Like a boxing glove filled with lead shot. Switching the GLE 63 S out of Comfort mode and into something more brutal like Sport, Sport+, or Race wakes this thing right the hell up. The torque boost from the ISG effectively eliminates turbo lag (despite the M176's "hot inner V" configuration—both turbos sit inside the V-8's V for the shortest possible runners—there's lag), and 603 horsepower is a lot. Will you see 100 mph much more frequently than you might like should you bigfoot the loud pedal? I know I did! AMG's claimed 3.7 seconds to 60 mph turned out to be conservative.

Steering is what it is, but there's just no way to mask 2.5 tons. Grip, however, is incredible, as all four wheels are wrapped in massiveMichelins: 285/40ZR22s up front, 325/35ZR22s rear. What does that mean? You can hustle the GLE 63 S as hard as you like on your favorite canyon road; it just feels a bit wooden. Look, AMG is fully capable of making great-handling cars, but they tend to be



2021 Mercedes-AMG GLE 63 S

PRICE	\$114,945
LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINE	4.0L/603-hp/627-lb-ft twin-turbo DOHC 32-valve V-8, plus 21-hp/184-lb-ft electric motor
TRANSMISSION	9-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	5,467 lb (56/44%)
WHEELBASE	117.9 in
L X W X H	194.3 in x 76.7 in x 70.4 in
0-60 MPH	3.4 sec
EPA FUEL ECON	16/24/21 mpg (est)
ENERGY CONSUMPTION, CITY/HWY	211/140 kW-hr/100 miles (est)
CO2 EMISSIONS, COMB	1.03 lb/mile (est)
ON SALE	July 2020



Taken as a whole, the Mercedes-AMG GLE 63 S is an impressive unit. More powerful than even AMG's mascot, the mighty G 63, this five-passenger SUV is a comfy, capable, pretty good-looking way to go drag racing. The GLE 63 S is missing the alacrity, the fleetness, the handling chops of the best of the crazy-powerful SUVs. The question is, does it need it? I'd argue no, as I can't see the owners of a luxury tank like this ever going hunting for back roads. The GLE 63 S is a classic AMG. Power first, power foremost, and man that's some pretty sweet leather. Sports car fans should look elsewhere. AMG fans, you're home. ■

